

The two last Speeches of  
*Thomas Wentworth*, late Earle of *Straf-*(8)  
*ford*, and Deputy of *Ireland*.

The one in the Tower, the other on  
the Scaffold on Tower-hill,

May the 12<sup>th</sup> 1641.



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2

His speech in the Tower to the Lords, before  
he went to execution.

**R**ight Honourable, and the rest, you are now come to convey mee to my death, I am willing to dye, which is a thing no more than all our Predecessors have done, and a debt that our Posteritie must in their due time discharge, which since it can be no way avoyded, it ought the lesse to be feared; for that which is common to all, ought not to be intolerable to any: It is the Law of Nature, the tribute of the flesh, a remedy from all worldly cares and troubles; and to the truly penitent, a perfect path to blessednesse. And there is but one death, though severall wayes unto it: mine is not naturall, but enforced by the Law and Justice: it hath bene sayd that the Lawes vex only the meaner sort of people, but the mightie are able to withstand them: it is not so with me, for to the Law I submit my selfe, and confesse that I receive nothing but justice: for hee that politickely intendeth good to a Common-wealth, may be called a just man, but hee that practiseth either for his owne profit, or any other sinister ends, may be well termed a delinquent person; neither is delay in punishment any privilege for pardon. And moreover, I ingenuously confesse with Cicero, That the death of the bad is the safetie of the good that be alive.

Let no man trust eyther in the favour of his Prince, the friendship and consanguinity of his Peeres, muchlesse in his owne wisdom and knowledge, of which I ingenuously confesse I have bene too confident. Kings, as they are men before God, so they are Gods before men, and I may say with a great man once in this Kingdome, *Had I strived to obey my*  
*God*

*God as faithfully, as I sought to honour my King diligently, I had stood, and not fallen:* Most happie and fortunate is that Prince, who is as much for his justice feared, as for his goodness beloved: For the greater that Princes are in power above other, the more they ought in vertue to excell other; and such is the royall Sovereigne whom I late served.

For my Peeres, the correspondence that I had with them during my prosperitie, was to mee very delightfull and pleasing, and here they have commiserated my ruine, I have plentifully found, who (for the most generous of them) I may boldly say, though they have detested the fact, yet they have pitied the person delinquent; the first in their loyaltie, the last in their charitie: Ingenuously confessing, that never any subject, or peere of my rank, had ever that help of Counsell, that benefit of time, or a more free and legall tryall than I have had: In the like whereof, none of my precessors hath had so much favour from his prince, so much sufferance from the people; in which I comprehend the understanding Commons, not the many headed monster, Multitude: But I have offended, am sentenced, and must now suffer.

And for my too much confidence in my supposed wisdom and knowledge, therein have beene the most deceived: For hee is wise to himselfe, that knowes by others faults to correct his owne offences: to be truly wise is to be secretaries to our selves; for it is meere folly to reveale our intimate thoughts to strangers: wisdom is the most precious Gem with which the mind can be adorned, and learning the most famous thing for which a man ought to bee esteemed, and true wisdom teacheth us to doe well, as to speake well: in the first I have failed, *for the wisdom of man is foolishnesse with God.*

For knowledge, it is a thing indifferent both to good and evil, but the best knowledge is for a man to know himselfe; hee that doth so, shal esteeme of himselfe but little, for hee considereth from whence he came, and wherto he must go, he

4

regardeth not the vaine pleasures of this life, hee exalseth God, and strives to live in his feare ; but he that knoweth not himselfe, is wisel in his owne wayes, unprofitable in his life, unfortunate in his death, and so am I. But the reason why I sought to attaine unto it, was this : I have read that he that knoweth not that which he ought to know, is a Bruic beast amongst men : hee that knoweth more than hee ought to know, is a man amongst beasts : but hee that knoweth all that may be knowne, is a God amongst men. To this I much aspired, in this I much failed ; *Vanitie of vanities, all is but vanitie.*

I have heard the people clamour and cry out, saying, That through my occasion the times are bad, I wish that when I am dead they may prove better : most true it is, that there is at this time a great storme impending (God in his mercie avert it.) And since it is my particular lot, like *Jonah*, to bee cast into the sea, I shall think my life well spent, to appease Gods wrath, and satisfie the peoples malice.

What is eloquence more than aire ? fashioned with an articulate and distinct sound, when it is a speciall vertue to speake litle and well, and silence is oft the best oratorie ; for fooles in their dumbnesse may bee accounted wise : It hath power to make a good matter seeme bad, and a bad cause appeare good : but mine was to mee unprofitable, and like the Cypresse trees, which are great and tall, but altogether without fruit.

What is honour ? but the first step to disquietnesse, and power is still waited on by envie, neither hath it any privilege against infamie. It is held to be the chiefe part of honor, for a man to joyne to his office and calling, curtesie and affabilitie, commiseration and pitie : for thereby he draweth to him with a kind of compulsion, the hearts of the multitude. But that was the least part of my study, which now makes me call to mind, that the greater the persons are in authority, the sooner they are catcht in any delinquencie, and their smallest

smallest crimes are thought to bee capitall, the smallest spot seemes great in the finest linnen, and the least flaw is soonest found in the richest Diamond. But high and noble spirits finding themselves wounded, grieve not so much at their owne paine and perplexitie, as at the derision and scoffs of their enemy : but for mine owne part, though I might have many in my life, I hope to finde none in my death.

Amongst other things which pollute and contaminate the mindes of great spirits, there is none more heinous than Ambition, which is seldome unaccompanied with Avarice: Such, to possesse their ends, care not to violate the Lawes of Religion, and Reason, and to breake the bonds of Modesty and equity, with the nearest ties of Consanguinity, and Amity; of which as I have beene guilty, so I crave at Gods hands forgivenessse. It is a Maxime in Philosophy; that ambitious men can bee never good Counsellours to Princes; the desire of having more is common to great Lords, and a desire of Rule a great cause of their Ruine.

My Lords, I am now the hopelesse President, may I bee to you all an happy example: For Ambition devoureth gold, and drinketh blood, and climbeth so high by other mens heads, that at the length in the fall it breaketh its own neck: therefore it is better to live in humble content, than in high care and trouble: For more precious is want with honesty, than wealth with infamy: For what are wee but meere vapours, which in a serene Element ascend high, and upon an instant, like Smoak, vanish into nothing: or like Ships without Pilors, tost up and downe upon the Seas by contrary winds and tempests. But the good husbandman thinks better of those eares of Corne, which bow downe, and grow crooked, than those which are streight and upright, because he is assured to finde more store of graine in the one than in the other. This all men know, yet of this, how few make use: The defect whereof must be now my paine; may my suffering prove to others profit.



For what hath now the favour of my Prince, the familiarity with my Peeres, the volubility of a tongue, the strength of my memory, my learning, or knowledge, my honours, or Offices, my power, and potency, my riches, and treasure, (all these the especiall gifts, both of Nature, and Fortune) what have all these profited mee? Blessings I acknowledge, though by God bestowed upon man; yet not all of them together upon many: yet by the Divine providence, the most of them met in me: of which had I made happy use, I might still have flourisht, who now am forc'd immaturesly to fall.

I now could wish, (but that *utinam* is too late) that God with his outward goodnesse towards mee had so commixed his inward grace, that I had chused the *mediū* path, neither inclining to the right hand, nor deviating to the left; but like *Icarus* with my waxen wings, fearing by too low a flight to moisten them with the Waves: I soared too high, and too neare the Sunne, by which they being melted; I aiming at the highest, am precipitated to the lowest: and am made a wretched prey to the Waters: But I who before built my house upon the sand, have now setled my hopes upon the Rock my Saviour: by whose onely merits my sole trust is, that whatsoever becomes of my body, yet in this bosome my soule may be Sanctuaried.

*Nimrod* would have built a Tower to reach up to heaven, and cald it *Babel*; but God turned it to the confusion of Languages, and dissipation of the people. *Pharaoh* kept the Children of *Israel* in bondage, and after having freed them, in his great pride would have made them his prey; but God gave them a drie and miraculous passage, and *Pharaoh* and his host a watric Sepulcher. *Belshazzar* feasted his Princes and Prostitutes, who drunke healths in the Vessells taken from the Temple, but the hand of God writ upon the wall, *Mene, Tekel, Phoras*, and that night before morning was both his Kingdome and life taken from him: Thus God lets men

men goe on a great while in their owne devices, but in the end it proved their own ruine and destruction; never suffering them to effect their desired purposes; therefore let us not presume upon his power; glory in his greatness, and be too confident in his riches: These things were written for our Instruction, of which the living may make use, the dying cannot; but wit and unfruitfull wisdom are the next neighbours to folly.

There can bee no greater vanity in the world, than to esteeme the world, which regardeth no man; and to make slight account of God who greatly respecteth all men: and there can bee no greater folly in man, than by much Travell to increase his goods, and pamper his body, and in the interim with vaine delights and pleasures, to lose his soule. It is a great folly in any man to attempt a bad beginning, in hope of a good ending; and to make that proper to one, which was before common to all, is meere indiscretion, and the beginning of discord, which I positively with may end in this my punishment.

O how small a proportion of earth will containe my body, when my high minde could not be confined within the spacious compasse of two Kingdomes? But my houre draweth on, and I conclude with the Psalmist, not ayming at any one man in particular, but speaking for all in generall: *How long will you Judges bee corrupted? how long will yee cease to give true Iudgement? &c. Blessed is the man that doth not walke in the Councell of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornfull, therefore they shall not stand in the Iudgement, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous, &c.*

About the houre of 12. a Clocke the aforesaid Lord of *Strafford* was conveyed to the Scaffold on *Tower Hill*, where was a Court of Guard made by the severall Companies of Souldiers of the City of *London*, and the Hamlets of the Tower on each side as he passed to the Scaffold: before marched

ched the Marshalls men to make way, then the Sherifes of Londons Officers with their Halberds; after them the Kings Guard, or warders of the Tower: Next came one of his Gentlemen, bare headed, in mourning Habit, the Lord *Strafford* following him clad in blacke cloath, with divers others in the same habit, which were his attendance; then the Lord Bishop of *Armagh*, and other good Divines; with the Sherifes of London, and divers honourable parsonages.



When he came to the Scaffold, he there shewed himselfe on each side in full view to all people, and made this short speech, with as much alacrity of Spirit, as a mortall man could expresse, viz.

The



*The Earle of Straffords last speech on  
the Scaffold.*



**M**Y Lord Primate of *Ireland*; (and my Lords, and the  
rest of these Gentlemen) it is a very great com-  
fort for me to have your Lordship by me this day,  
in regard I have been knowne to you a long time,  
I should be very glad to obtaine so much silence;  
as to bee heard a few words; but I doubt I shall  
not, my Lord. I come hither by the good will  
and pleasure of Almighty God, to pay that last debt I owe unto sin,  
which is death, and by the blessing of that God to rise again through  
the merits of Christ Jesus to eternall glorie. And bee being dis-  
turbed by the people, hee said, *What is the matter?* and sate downe  
in a chaire: some replyed, The Souldiers kept most stir: *If they*, said  
he, *would be quiet, all the rest would be quiet.* I wish I had been pri-  
vate and unpaiged how richly my Lord saw I narrowly but narrowly

vate, that I might have been heard, my Lord, if I might be so much beholding to you, that I might use a few words, I should take it for a very great courtesy: my Lord, I come hither to submit to that judgement which hath past against me, I doe it with a very quiet and contented minde, I doe freely forgive all the world, a forgiveness that is not spoken from the teeth outward (as they say) but from the heart; I speake it in the presence of Almighty God, before whom I stand, that there is not so much as a displeasing thought in me arising to any creature, I thank God, I may say truly, and my conscience beares mee witness, that in all my services, since I have had the honour to serve his Majestie in any employment, I never had any thing in my heart, but the joynt and individuall prosperitie of King and people; if it have beene my hap to be misconceyved, it is the common proportion of us all, while we are in this life, the righteous judgement is hereafter; here we are subject to erreur, and apt to bee mis-judged one of another, there is one thing I desire to cleere my selfe of, and I am verie confident, I shall have much clearnesse, that I hope I shall have your Christian charge in the beleefe of it, I did alwayes ever thinke the Parliament of England, were the happiest Constitutions, that any Kingdome, or any Nation lived under, and under God the meanes of making King and people happy, so far have I bene from being against Parliaments; for my death I have sought all the world, and pray God heartily to forgive them; and in particular, my Lord Primate, I am verie glad that his Majestie is pleased to conceive mee, not meriting so severe and heauey a punishment as the utmost execution of this sentences; I am verie glad, and infinitely rejoyces in this increas of his, & beseech God to turne it to him, that hee may finde mercy when he hath most need of it; I wish this Kingdome all the prosperity and happinesse in the world: I did it living, and now dying it is my wish, I doe now professe it from my heart, and do most humbly recommend it unto every man here, and with every man to lay his hand upon his heart, and consider seriously whither the beginning of the happinesse of a people should be written in letters of blood; I feare you are in a wrong way and I desire Almighty God that no one drop of my blood may rise up in judgment against you.

My Lord of *Armagh*, I professe my selfe a Protestant, and a true and obedient Son to the Church of England, to that Church wherein I was borne and wherein I was bred; *prosperity and happinesse be ever*

to it: and whereas it hath beene sayd that I have inclin'd to *Papery*, if it be an objection worth answering, let me say truly, that from the time since I was one and twenty yeares of age, till this houre, now going upon nine & forty, I never had thought in my heart, to doubt of the truth of my Religion, nor to my best memory durst any ever profer it any kind whatsoever; and so being reconciled to the mercies of *Christ Iesus my Saviour*, into whose bosome I hope shortly to bee gathered, to enjoy those eternall happinsses that shall never have end. I desire hartily the forgivenesse of every man, both for any rash or unadvised word or deed, and desire your prayers; And so my Lords farwell, farwell all things of this world; Lord strengthen my faith; give me confidence and assurance in the merits of *Christ Iesus*. I desire you that you would be silent, and ioyne in Prayers with me, and for me; and I trust in God that we shall all meet, and live eternally in Heaven, there to receive the accomplishment of all happines, where every teare shall bee wiped from our eyes, and every sad thought from our hearts: And so God bless this Kingdom and Iesus have mercy upon my Soule.

FINIS.